

Customs House
Frederiksted
St. Croix Island
Virgin Islands

HABS No. VI-46

HABS
VI,
1-FRED,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Addendum to:

Custom House
Custom House Street
Frederiksted
St. Croix
Virgin Islands

HABS No. VI-46

HABS
VI,
1 - FRED
2 -

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CUSTOM HOUSE

HABS No. VI-46

HABS
VI
1-FRED,
2-

Location: Custom House Street, Frederiksted, St. Croix, Virgin Islands

General Statement:

Architectural character: Although the original 18th-century design of the Custom House is discernible, both in the building's over-all form and in its details, the addition of a front gallery and a hipped roof above the parapet wall have obscured its authentic architectural character. Nevertheless, this structure is a fine example of the late 18th century Danish civic architecture of the Virgin Islands with typical construction details and architectural elements.

Condition of fabric: The building appears to be in good condition, is structurally sound, and the finishes are good to fair.

Description of Exterior

Detailed description: The building is free-standing. It faces Strand Street to the west and is bordered by Custom House Street to the south, the municipal park to the north and a wide secondary street to the east.

Foundation: The foundation is constructed of rubble masonry of an undetermined depth. On the front and rear of the building, the foundation is articulated by a slightly projecting plinth.

Wall construction: The walls are brick masonry set in lime mortar and plastered. A second story wood gallery supported on masonry posts on the ground floor was added to the entire length of the front of the building at an early date. The wall behind the gallery is divided vertically into three sections by slightly protruding quoined wings. Each wing is two bays wide. The entire building is divided horizontally by a band and a cornice at the second floor line and at the roof, respectively. The center section of the front has three arched openings on the first floor with profiled imposts. A band at the same height as the imposts extends to wings and around the arches flanked by plaster panels. On the second floor the mid-section has a central doorway. All corners of the building are quoined. The walls are painted yellow with white trim.

Openings:

Doors and doorways: The building is three by seven bays. Except for the arched openings on the ground floor mentioned above, all doorways are devoid of decoration. The north arch is furnished with a fixed wrought-iron picket grill. The central arch has a wooden picket gate. The south arch is open and contains the staircase to the second floor. The central bay of both end elevations have double doors of double-plank construction. The second floor front has three doors opening off the balcony (the second, fourth and sixth bay). The doorways have solid double-plank shutters and jalousie doors. The shutters as well as the doors are double. The doors are divided vertically into three sections with a panel in the lower section.

Windows: On the ground floor, all windows have horizontal iron bars and shutters of double-plank construction. On the second floor, the windows are all furnished with shutters of similar construction and jalousie sash with movable louvres. Shutters are painted green. The jalousie sash is painted white and louvres green.

Roof: The building has a hipped roof on wood joists with a corrugated metal roofing. It rests on the parapet walls and covers the original flat brick roof still in place behind the 2- to 3-foot parapet. The corrugated metal roof extends slightly beyond the face of the original crown band of the wall. As previously mentioned, there is a cornice on all sides of the building at the level of the original roof. The gallery has a corrugated metal shed roof.

Porches: The second floor gallery mentioned under wall construction is supported on six masonry pillars. The second and fifth pillars are round, while the remaining ones are square in sections. All pillars have bases and capitals. The gallery rests on wooden beams and has a tongue-and-groove pine board floor. A balustrade with turned banisters is set between the eight evenly-spaced wood columns that support the roof of the gallery. The wooden columns are square in section. At their mid-point the edges are chamfered and the upper half of the columns are octagonal in section. They terminate in a square capital. The gallery roof is trimmed with jig-saw scroll work wooden edging.

Description of the Interior:

Floor plan: Both floors of the building are divided into four rooms by masonry walls, a room one bay deep along the entire rear of the building and three rooms toward the front of the building, 2 by 2 bays, 2 by 3 bays, and 2 by 2 bays, respectively.

Stairway: The building contains one stairway located in the third bay from the south leading from the ground floor gallery to the center room on the second floor. It is an open stringer, straight-run wooden stair with a turned banister rail.

Floors: The ground floor has concrete pavement. The second floor has a tongue-and-groove pine board flooring.

Wall and ceiling finishes: Both floors have exposed beam ceilings. The beams are finished and beaded. The ground floor has a wood ceiling, while the second floor has a whitewashed brick ceiling supported on wood purlins and beams. All interior masonry walls are plastered.

Doorways and doors: There are three types of double doors: (1) flush doors of double-plank construction; (2) three-section doors with jalousies in the two upper sections and a solid panel in the lower section; and (3) solid triple-panel doors. The latter two types are only on the second floor.

Trim: The trim is limited to the second floor and consists of baseboard and casings around door openings. All woodwork, except where otherwise noted, is painted white.

Hardware: Doors and windows have wrought-iron hardware, strap and H hinges, storm hooks, bar rings, sill and head hooks for the interior. Second floor doors have porcelain door knobs and box locks. The gallery has supplementary wrought-iron bracket supports.

Lighting: Electricity. No evidence observed of earlier types of illumination.

Site:

General setting: The building has a prominent site in the harbor area, and is surrounded by a paved area on all sides. It contains a wagon weighing scale in the center room of the ground floor. Carts and wagons entered the building through the center arched opening.

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